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LEGISLATIVE HISTORY OF LONG-TERM CAMP SITE LEASING LAW

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This report provides the legislative history of [CGS § 23-16a](#), which phased out long-term campsite leases at Connecticut's shore parks.

SUMMARY

State law allows the energy and environmental protection commissioner (formerly the environmental protection commissioner) to enter into leases of state park camping sites with state residents and nonresidents. But it limits a family to no more than three weeks total at each shore park (i.e., Hammonasset and Rocky Neck state parks) each year.

In 1969, the General Assembly passed PA 69-733 which, among other things, required the State Park and Forest Commission to (1) determine the number of shore park camping sites leased for more than three weeks in a year to the same family and (2) phase out these leases by reducing them in equal numbers over five years.

At the time, state residents could participate in a publicized lottery for long-term campsite leases at the state's two shore parks. According to information presented during the House debate, Hammonasset and Rocky Neck state parks together had 632 long-term and 479 short-term campsites.

The State Development Committee held a public hearing on the original bill, HB 7024 (1969), which required shore park sites to be leased for no more than three weeks total to the same family in a season. Bill supporters argued, among other things, that long-term leasing was unfair to short-term campers and the state lost tourism revenue. Opponents' arguments included that (1) more campsites could be developed to accommodate all campers, (2) there was less demand for short-term camping, and (3) ending short-term camping should be at the State Park and Forest Commission's discretion.

The committee reported a substitute version of the bill that required the State Park and Forest Commission to determine the number of long-term campsites leased to the same family for greater than three weeks and phase out the leases in equal numbers over five years.

Floor debates on the substitute bill offered similar arguments to those presented at the public hearing. The substitute bill passed both chambers by voice vote, which the governor signed.

PA 71-872, the act that created the Department of Environmental Protection, amended the statute by making minor and conforming changes.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

Public Hearing and Committee Action

On February 19, 1969, the State Development Committee held a public hearing on HB 7024 (1969) to prohibit leasing campsites at shore parks to the same family for longer than three weeks total in a camping season. Seventeen individuals testified, five in favor of the bill and twelve against it.

Speakers in favor of the bill included individuals from the North American Family Campers Association, National Campers and Hikers Association, Connecticut Campground Owners Association, Connecticut Audubon Council, and Connecticut Forest and Park Association. They generally argued that the long-term leasing system was unfair to in-state and out-of-state short-term campers, particularly those who were turned away from a park because it was filled. They said campers avoided Connecticut parks because there was no guarantee of an available campsite and argued that the state was losing camper tourist revenue. Many emphasized the increase in camping's popularity and a lack of campsites to accommodate demand.

Opponents, including many long-term campers, argued that there was no need to eliminate long-term leasing. Some of their arguments included that (1) there was enough land available to develop more campsites, (2) there was not enough demand for short-term camping, and (3) holiday weekends were the only time short-term campers were turned away. Some said that the state profited from long-term camping because campers spent money at the shore and rented sites even in poor weather. Others highlighted the recreational benefits of long-term camping and expressed concern about the long-term campers' investment in equipment. And some said out-of-state campers leave parks because of a lack of facilities, not a lack of available sites.

Arthur Stanley, a state park and forest commissioner opposing the bill, reported that the State Park and Forest Commission (1) believed that the number of long and short-term campsites should be at its discretion and (2) supported more short-term site development. He argued that maintaining short-term sites is more expensive because they are not as full as the long-term sites, particularly during the week. Harvey Wahquist of the Connecticut Campers and Trailers Association also argued that ending long-term leasing should be the commission's decision and he said the elimination would result in a financial loss to the state.

The committee favorably reported a substitute version of the bill requiring the State Park and Forest Commission to determine the number of long-term campsites leased to the same family for greater than three weeks and phasing out the leases in equal numbers over five years.

House Debate

The House took up the bill (File No. 1184) on May 26. Representative Tudan introduced the bill and spoke in its favor.

Representative Donnelly then offered House Amendment "A" to reduce (1) the maximum length of a campsite lease from three weeks to two and (2) the long-term lease phase out period from five years to two. Representative Tudan opposed the amendment saying that the five year phase out period was fair to long-term campers. The amendment failed on a voice vote.

Representatives Allen, Carlson, Gillies, Holdsworth, McKinney, O'Neill, Ryan, and Stecker also spoke in the bill's favor. Many emphasized the (1) inequity of the long-term leases; (2) increased demand for camping; (3) insufficient number of sites for short-term camping,

particularly on weekends; (4) revenue loss from turning away campers; and (5) fact that Connecticut was the only state to allow such long-term leasing. Representative Allen warned that continuing the leases would jeopardize federal aid. He and Representative Stecker said that state park and forest commissioners supported eliminating them. Representative Stecker also agreed with some of the bill's opponents that the state needed more sites, but said funding concerns made it more sensible to accommodate more people by eliminating long-term leasing.

Representatives Avcollie, Gregorzek, Hogan, King, Mortenson, Sarasin, and Yedziniak spoke in opposition to the bill. Several stated that sufficient sites were available for both long-term and short-term campers, while others said the state should provide more short-term sites instead of eliminating the long-term leases. Representative Hogan noted that the only parks supporting themselves were the parks allowing long-term leasing and these parks helped support the other state parks. Representative Avcollie said the state should focus on serving Connecticut residents instead of out-of-state campers and he rejected the argument that long-term leasing should end because Connecticut was the only state to allow it. He was also concerned that the bill, if it became law as written, could be abused because it did not define "family."

During the debate, Representative Avcollie requested a roll call vote on the bill, but the request was defeated. The bill passed on a voice vote.

Senate Debate

The Senate took up the bill on June 2. Senator Buckley summarized it and explained that the bill would make state-owned shore campsites equally available to as many citizens as possible. Senators Gunther and Lupton also spoke in its favor. Senator Gunther cited the state's campsite shortage and noted the lost revenue from out-of-state campers. He also said the bill's phase out period was fair to long-term campers. Senator Lupton asked how the first phased out campers would be chosen and Senator Buckley explained the phase out would occur by reducing the number of sites available in the annual lottery. The bill then passed on a voice vote.

Final Action

The governor signed the bill into law on July 1, 1969. It became effective on January 1, 1970.

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